Fest Preview: 2021 Chicago Film Critics Festival is Nov. 12-14

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on November 12, 2021 - 12:09pm

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CHICAGO – After a postponement in 2020, the Chicago Film Critics Festival (CCFF) – the only U.S. film fest curated by film critics – will present a truncated weekend of films from the major festivals in 2021 and the upcoming Awards Season favorites. The fest kicks off Friday, November 12th at Chicago's Music Box Theatre. For details on passes , films and tickets, click CCFF 2021 [23].

Festival highlights … besides the previews below … include the Opening Night film, The Lost Daughter [24], filmmaker Jane Campion's The Power of the Dog [25], a film showcase CCFF Shorts Program [26]and the Closing Night Film, Red Rocket [27]. Click on the links for description and ticket information.

PREVIEW OF THE 2021 CCFF: Capsule Reviews



The Novice
Photo credit: CCFF

Click the title for information …



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

”The Novice” **[28]** – Awarded the Best U.S. Narrative at 2021 Tribeca, this film lives up to the honor as an intense character study of a female student/athlete named Alex Dall (Isabelle Fuhrman, who also took home Best Actress), beginning her adventure on a college-level rowing team as a “novice.” Her intensity to be the best borders on obsession, and her teammates don’t take too kindly to that, or her. The film builds a suspense around Alex, until the audience is swallowed up and practically becomes her. Writer/director Lauren Hadaway, in her feature debut, focuses on the micro level in “making the team” and on the macro level in maturating as a human being during a challenging and confusing time.



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

”Bernstein’s Wall” **[29]** – A bright and cerebral biography of composer/conductor Leonard Bernstein, one of the greatest classical music masters of the 20th Century. This force of nature rose from modest and non-musical roots that began by plinking on a piano at age ten to eventually became assistant conductor (and celebrity) at New York’s Philharmonic at age 25. The key to his greatness was in his teaching method, engaging his audiences with stories of how classical music fits into our humanity. What is striking about “Lenny” is his empathetic intellectualism, how he wanted the world to melt its weapons into the ploughshares of music’s beautiful noise. There is a wealth of archival footage to tell his story (mostly in Bernstein’s own voice) and director Douglas Tirola makes creative use of it. One of my favorites from the festival, mostly because I love Lenny and his times of influence.



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

”Jockey” **[30]** – Essentially a western, substituting the race jockey for the cowboy. The writer/director Clint Bentley comes from that horse racing world, and creates his main jockey character Jackson (Clifton Collins Jr. in a Best Actor level performance) with the old gunslinger mentality, albeit in another profession. When the young upstart (Moisés Arias) comes to town to challenge Jackson’s legacy, the old cowboy has to think about riding into the sunset. Director Bentley uses the sunset as a magic hour light to symbolize this twilight, and actor Collins provides the rest. A film lesson in integrity and morality.



Roy’s World
Photo credit: TribecaFilm.com



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

”Roy’s World” **[31]** – A beautifully rendered “soul documentary” of Chicago, through the eyes of Barry Gifford, who grew up in the city during the magic years of the 1950s and ‘60s, when the environs were more gritty and working class. Roy refers to the fictional character that Gifford based his childhood on, and excerpts from his stories are read by Willem Dafoe, Matt Dillon and Lily Taylor. Gifford himself is woven through the doc, as he counters the fiction with his real life story. Director Rob Christopher did a remarkable turn using archival footage of Chicago and editing to evoke the feeling of time and place. If you are interested in a personal history of Chicago, unencumbered by the dry dust of history, then “Roy’s World” is a must see.

CLARE COONEY INTERVIEW with HollywoodChicago.com. Clare Cooney will appear with co-writer/director Abby Pierce on behalf of their short film “Go Ahead… Grab Time By the Throat” at the 2021 CCFF. Click CLARE COONEY [32].

The 2021 Chicago Critics Film Festival takes place November 12th through the 14th. For more information on the Chicago Film Critics Association, click CFCA [33].

[34]

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Source URL (retrieved on *Mar 29 2024 - 5:32am*):
http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/36181/fest-preview-2021-chicago-film-critics-festival-is-nov-12-14-at-music-box-theatre

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